

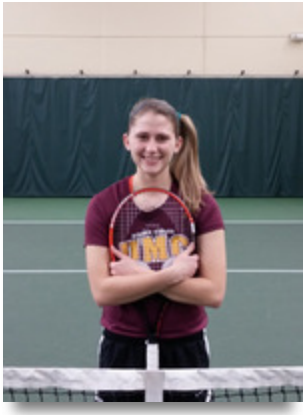
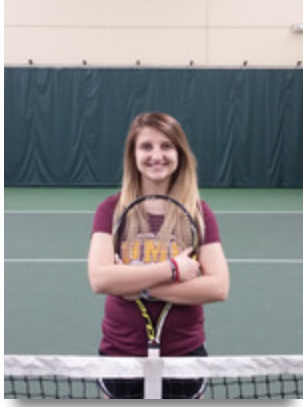
News Release

U of M Crookston Soccer Players Nikki Dogan, Grand Forks, N.D., and Rachelle Alcini, Ann Arbor, Mich., on the Tennis Court for the Golden Eagles

By Elizabeth Tollefson on Monday, March 16, 2015

She has played soccer since second grade, and when she talks about her role as a center midfielder for the

University of Minnesota Crookston Golden Eagles, you easily pick up on the passion Freshman Nikki Dogan (photo, right), Grand Forks, N.D., feels for the sport.



That passion runs high for her teammate Senior Rachelle Alcini (photo, left), Ann Arbor, Mich., as well. She started playing soccer when she was five and a flyer was placed in her kindergarten mailbox and she told her mom she wanted to play.

But, this spring, you will find Alcini and Dogan off the field and on the court playing tennis for the Golden Eagles.

The two have discovered there is room in one's heart for a second sport, and it all began for Dogan when she was traveling for soccer last fall and mentioned she thought tennis was fun. "My coach overheard me and asked if I might be interested in meeting with the tennis coach and possibly having an opportunity to play Golden Eagle Tennis," Dogan says. "I was both surprised and intrigued."

Alcini was encouraged by Assistant Athletic Director Kathleen Brown because of her athleticism to try playing tennis. "I bought a racket the day of our first practice," Alcini says. "At first I told the tennis coach, I was not sure, but then, I reconsidered the chance to play tennis at the collegiate level, and I couldn't resist the opportunity.

"I must admit playing tennis with experienced players is a humbling experience" Alcini continues. "Trying a new sport and playing it at the collegiate level is truly humbling and thanks to a team that welcomed me with open arms, the experience has also been gratifying and fun."

The rest as they say is history. After speaking with Head Tennis Coach Ryan McGuigan, Dogan and Alcini decided to give tennis a try. "I have played tennis for fun, but never competitively so the transition to tennis player has had a learning curve," Dogan smiles. "But, when you start with pretty much nothing, you really can only go up!"

The tennis team has embraced the newcomers and encouraged their efforts. "I love it," Dogan says. "Sometimes it is tough for me when we play really good teams who take it to me, but I am having fun all the same."

Alcini echoes the sentiment, "It has been interesting and terrifying all at once but our team has been relaxed

and patient about having us on the team. They have really made us feel welcome, and what is really great is the support I have felt from my soccer teammates."



Both Alcini and Dogan believe athletics makes you a better student. "Being an athlete keeps me on my toes, pushes me to be organized, and makes me manage my time so I can succeed athletically and academically," Dogan says. "I still have fun with friends and family, but I love being a student-athlete so I have to prioritize."

Without a tennis facility on campus, playing tennis means practicing in the evening from 9 to 10:30 p.m. at Choice Health and Fitness in Grand Forks three times a week. "I have soccer in the mornings to work on conditioning, footwork, and lifting," Dogan says. "Those workouts keep me in shape for tennis, and tennis is helping me stay in shape for soccer."

For Alcini, who finished her final year as a member of the Golden Eagle Soccer Team, it has been a way to transition away from her first love--soccer and allowed her to enjoy the competition and the camaraderie of the tennis team. "I have gotten to try something new and still be a part of something," she says. "It has given me a certain kind of peace I can't explain."

Although Coach McGuigan and Head Soccer Coach Joe Alianiello have different styles, Alcini and Dogan love them both. Dogan says soccer has taught her to push her limits but she is learning mental toughness from tennis aiding in her development as an all around student-athlete. The athleticism of soccer appeals as well to Alcini. "I have more stamina, agility, and coordination, thanks to soccer and that helps my tennis game."

Dogan reflects on her first point as a tennis player, "I used to wonder why tennis players got so excited about one point, but when I hit a shot down the line and the opposition couldn't get to it. I knew exactly why; I couldn't have been more excited."

For Alcini, who describes herself as shy, soccer taught her leadership, discipline, and perseverance. "It has just made me better," she states. Tennis has allowed her to laugh at herself while challenging this highly competitive young woman to work hard to improve. "Tennis is quieter than soccer, so I had to control myself after I won a game because I was so excited," she confides. "I didn't win the match but it was really exciting when I won that first game."

Alcini will graduate in May with a degree in health science and is planning to go on to become a chiropractor. "It was the best decision I ever made to go to college in Crookston, I have learned so much about myself, and had countless opportunities to grow because of it," she says. "I came to a campus I had never heard of and now I call it home."

Dogan hopes to combine a degree in communication with her long-time interest in psychology in the future, but right now, these student-athlete are working to be their best on the field, on the court, AND in the classroom.

The two play their next home game on Friday, March 27 when the Golden Eagles take on the University of Mary Marauders at Choice Health and Fitness at 5:30 p.m. That same weekend, Golden Eagle Tennis will face Minnesota State University Moorhead on Saturday, March 28 at 2 p.m. and Bemidji State University on Sunday, March 29 at 3:30 p.m. To learn more, visit goldeneaglesports.com.

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